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UPDATE

US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement
Watauga and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina
North Carolina Department of Transportation
TIP No. R-2237C

BYPASS ALTERNATIVES STUDY COMPLETE

Four Bypass Alternatives Selected for Detailed Evaluation and Comparison to Widening Alternative in DEIS

The North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) comparison of potential bypass alternatives is complete. Seventeen bypass alternatives were considered and four were selected for detailed evaluation, including one with a tunnel under the Blue Ridge Parkway. Seven alternatives, including two of the selected alternatives, were added to the study since the August 1, 1996 Citizens Informational Workshop, in response to comments by citizens and the Blowing Rock Town Council. The four selected bypass alternatives are shown on page 2. They were chosen for detailed evaluation for the following reasons:

• Alternative 1 (called Alternative E in the bypass study)

- Shortest and least expensive bypass alternative.
- Can be designed to avoid historic resources.
- Has the least visual impact on the Blue Ridge Parkway.
- Has a minimal impact on the Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds when compared to other alternatives ending south of the Parkway.

• Alternative 4 (called Alternative CC-CI in the bypass study)

- Avoids the Town of Blowing Rock by ending north of the Parkway, passing under the Parkway in a tunnel
- Bypasses the final curves on existing US 321 before Blowing Rock.

These alternatives were selected for further study and comparison to the widening alternative recognizing that each offers a different set of tradeoffs, particularly between cost and social and natural resource impacts. The support each has from state and federal regulatory agencies, the Citizens' Advisory Committee, public officials, and citizens in general differs. Many citizens, including the Town Council of Blowing Rock and most members of the study's Citizens' Advisory Committee, do not support the bypass alternatives whose northern terminus is south of the Blue Ridge Parkway or the widening alternative.

Next Steps

During preparation of the DEIS, the following activities will occur for all alternatives:

- Design refinement
- Detailed impacts assessment

- **Alternative 2 (a combination of bypass study Alternatives F and H)**

- Can be designed to avoid historic resources.
- Avoids the US 321/Opossum Hollow Road intersection.

- **Alternative 3 (called Alternative CC-CH in the bypass study)**

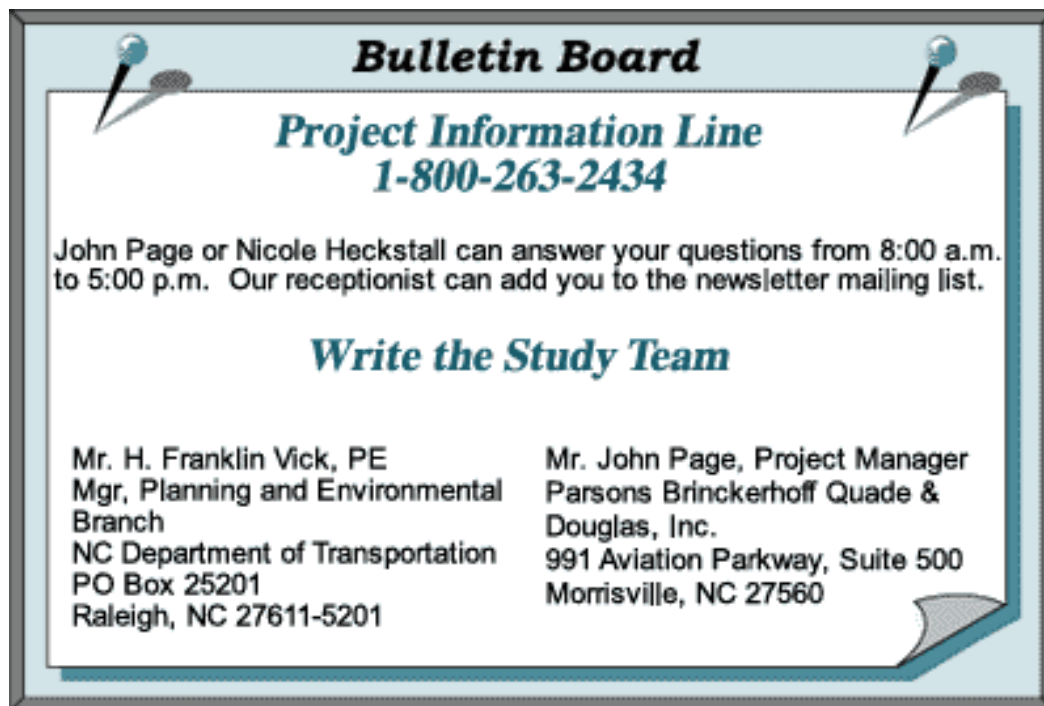
- Passes through the Blowing Rock area as close as possible to the Blue Ridge Parkway and avoids the US 321/Opossum Hollow Road intersection.
- Bypasses the final curves on existing US 321 before Blowing Rock, an area where sharp curves and steep grades would remain with the widening alternative.

- Planning for mitigation of impacts and minimization of harm

This will include special studies to address:

- Construction phasing and traffic control
- The affect of the area's geology on design and constructability
- Blasting requirements
- Landscape design
- Economic impacts

Details on the schedule and activities of the DEIS preparation phase will be described in future newsletters. The selection of an alternative for implementation will not be made until after the DEIS is made available for public review and a public hearing is held.



MAP OF ALTERNATIVES SELECTED FOR EVALUATION IN DEIS

